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ABSTRACT

Parents might be the last to know that "parent involvement" is one of this country's national educational goals. They may understand that success or failure in school is often an indication of success or failure in life; but they may not be aware of how significant parental influence really is on their child's learning. Children who see their parents reading understand that reading is important. Parents who listen to children are teaching them to accept the ideas of others. Giving explanations to children helps them to see how communication works and helps the child give explanations to others. Two stories, one written by a mother (the author of this paper) and one by her son show how children emulate their parents. The mother's story is about being a cockatiel who flies away from his owner, Benjamin, but eventually finds his way back to him. The boy's story is about being a cockatiel, born in an Australian zoo and taken as a pet. He too flies away and is returned to his owner. Parents do not have to be published writers to be good models. (TB)

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A WRITING MODEL

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Parents might be the last to know that "Parental Involvement" is one of our national education goals. They may understand that success or failure in school, is often an indication of success or failure in life; but they may not be aware of how significant parental influence really is on their child's learning. Most of us know the importance of computers, telescopes, and books in the home, but modelling, intentionally or unintentionally, is a powerful teaching/learning tool.

Children who see their parents reading, understand that reading is important. Parents who really listen to children are teaching them to accept the ideas of others. Giving explanations to children helps them to see how communication works and helps the child give explanations to others. When parents take time to list steps, one-two-three, the child learns about sequence. Parents who play with puzzles and word games enable children to become familiar with vocabulary and language exercises. Frequent talking to a child and requiring a thoughtful response encourages practice in conversation and thinking.

Many of the things that children observe their parents doing, teaches them about literacy. I'd like to share an example of how modelling can work. After my ten year old son read a story I had written about his pet bird, he wrote a story of his own. My story is entitled, "Benjamin's Bird." My son's story is called, "Armanda's Adventures."

<u>BENJAMIN'S BIRD</u>

Both my parents were Australian born, but I like to think of myself as a naturalized citizen of the USA. My first recollections

are of a cold, quiet parking lot the day after Christmas when Benjamin purchased me at the pet store.

It was a package deal which included more than I really needed; but little kids have to learn some things by experience. Of course, Benjamin was not an ordinary kid. I could see the beginnings of a true entrepreneur. I was named after Armand Hammer, the financial wizard Ben-boy admired.

"Armand," he'd scold, "there'll be no more honeystick until I decide. Those things are too expensive for you to eat just what tastes best. We have to consider the nutritional level."

Later, my name was changed to Armanda, since I didn't develop the vibrant coloring of the male cockatiel and I tried to lay eggs in my water dish.

"Mom," asked Benjamin, "why do you suppose Armand sleeps in his water cup?"

"We better ask at the pet store," his mother responded.

Benjamin relayed the information from the pet store attendant in an attempt to impress his father. "You see, Pop," the kid began, "it's pretty logical to assume that if we provide a nest the bird might lay eggs in it."

In his own quiet way his father always had the final say, "Well, Ben, there isn't much sense in having eggs that will never hatch." Everyone was surprised when three eggs appeared on the floor of my cage. Benjamin removed them with amazement.

My habitat was a typical, inexpensive cockatiel cage with two mirrors, a bell I could ring, a cuttlebone made from that squid-like fish with ten arms, plenty of food, water, and gravel, and a

huge swing I never did try.

Every Saturday Benjamin would say, "Well, Armmy, it's time to get cleaned up," and everything in the cage was scrubbed and dried. And daily, the accumulations of seed shells I had thrown on the floor with a great deal of pride were vacuumed by Benjamin with never a complaint. In the evening, he'd say, "Good night, Armmy." And, I'd hop over to my water cup and he would cover my cage. I never wanted for any necessity.

Occasionally, I chose to leave my cage and investigate the premises. Walking around the house was an activity the whole family enjoyed. They'd coach me shouting, "No, Armmy!" "Look, Armmy!" "Over here, Armmy." But I did my own thing.

Usually, in the morning I listened to Benjamin play scales on the violin. Whoever said that "Violin playing is for the birds" was not a bird. Nevertheless, I was a good audience and the concerts continued. After one accident in Benjamin's new violin case, I did my listening from a distance.

I remember one time Benjamin got the idea that I would learn to talk through repetition. Day after day he played a tape recording of the same old boring parrot words. I listened because I recognized the sound of the voice. Not knowing that I was too young to learn words, Benjamin never gave up.

"For Pete's sake Benjamin, do you have to play that stupid tape every day?" his sister would ask. If I could have spoken, I would have asked the same question.

Other times, Benjamin would read or do homework, but he was always near. Then came summer and we were together all the time.

One beautiful Saturday after cartoons and chores, Benjamin opened my cage which was temporarily out on the patio. He did this often so that I could have exercise and fresh air; Benjamin was a great believer in body building.

"Come on Army," he would say, "a sound body and a sound mind are characteristics we both need." So, I climbed to the top of my cage as I have done many times before. I don't know what possessed me, but a moment later I spread my giant cockatiel wings and flew away. "No, Armmy!" cried Benjamin. But, oh, the soaring joy of flight held my attention tight.

It rained for three nights and turned cold. I could feel it in my small cockatiel heart. I sat low in the brush and pondered--"Give me your tired, your cold, your hungry," I could almost hear the words which Benjamin had read to me from his school book. But the worst was the loneliness.

With the morning sun some children had come out to play; and, although their voices were unfamiliar to me, they talked incessantly just like Benjamin's tape. I was drawn to the sounds. Without a thought, I flew in for a closer observation. They surrounded me. They poked me and chased me. I scrambled to get away, but I was too cold, too tired, too hungry to withstand their taunts. I began to cry out when a big brown hand encased my worn-out body, and I bit it, drawing blood.

I awakened in a warm parakeet cage and soon discovered what Benjamin had meant when he used to say, "Armmy, you are lucky to have cockatiel food because those parakeet seeds have no substance." I stayed perched under mini-motorhome conditions

refusing many friendly fingers, being as mean and miserable as I could be.

Epilogue: On the same day that the ad appeared in the paper -- COCKATIEL FOUND -- Benjamin came to take me home.

"Oh, Armmy," he declared as he put his shaking hand under me, "it certainly is a grand day!"

ARMANDA'S ADVENTURES

Prologue: I was born on the continent of Australia in the southern hemisphere. I emigrated from there to the United States hearing that America was a free enterprise system and because I was to be sold to some American for --get this --$60! The least these people could do, after taking me from my mother, is to sell me for a decent price! Anyway, here's my story.

My life as a cockatiel began in Brisbane, Australia. I was born at a small zoo near Brisbane's west side in its cockatiel aviary. I was taken from the nest as soon as I could eat by myself. I kissed my mother and father goodbye and was taken to a huge cage with about thirty other cockatiels. Then, the strangest thing happened. A loud noise blasted forth from outside of the cage. Next, I felt a lift under me. We all began to pace around nervously. The noise continued for a long while. After that, I felt us begin to fall. I gripped my perch tight and soon it was over.

We were then taken to a large contraption and began to move along rather bumpily. After a while this ended. We were taken into an enormous building and left at a Doctor Pet Center.

One day I was sitting in the cage minding my own business when

I noticed a kid pointing at me. "Uh-oh!" I thought. I knew what it meant when a kid pointed at one of us. That meant we would be caught in a net and disappear, perhaps never to return again.

The door opened. I went down to the floor of the cage and tried to escape. I got caught in a big, scary net. Then, I was quickly carried away and put in a box. I got cold, then warm again. I felt us move and, after some time, I was released into another, smaller cage.

Those first few days I just paced around my cage. I was scared, alone, and nervous all at the same time. Later, a cardboard partition was put in so that I couldn't pace around. I would usually climb over it, but after I had become used to my surroundings I began to sit on my perch.

Every week my cage would be cleaned, and I got plenty of fresh bedding at the bottom of my cage. I didn't like it at first, all those hands in my territory at once, but I got used to it.

Once in a while, I would get a chance to explore the grounds. After a while I began to climb to the top of my cage and fly off, instead of just jumping out on my door. One day I was in my cage out on the patio when my door was opened. I climbed to the top and took off. I flew around at heights I had never dreamed possible. I was chased from tree to tree for a long time before, finally, I was left alone.

It was several days before I saw some people playing. "Good!" I thought. I flew around them, landed, and was captured. Later, I was put in a small, very claustrophobic but warm parakeet cage for a few days until my owner came with my big cockatiel cage. I

climbed in and was taken home.

Benjamin typed his story as I had mine. He made it as good as he could as I did mine. Neither of us had direct instruction or been given an assignment. There were no corrections and we never got a grade. Still, everytime we did something like this together, our literacy skills improved. Every story was a step toward becoming a better writer.

From watching and imitating the language skills of their parents, children gain insights, attitudes, and behaviors which will help them to be successful in and out of school and in life. Parents don't have to be published writers to be good models.